

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 1-7, 9-12 and 14-23 are pending. Claims 1, 4, 6, 9, 10, 14 and 15-17 are amended. Claims 8 and 13 are canceled without prejudice or disclaimer. New claims 18-23 are submitted.

In response to the Office Action, favorable reconsideration and allowance of the present application are respectfully requested. The Office Action rejected claims 1, 2, 4-6 and 8-11 as obvious in view of Takekuma and Kimura. Claim 3 was rejected as obvious in view of the foregoing references and Masayuki. Claims 9 and 10 were rejected as obvious in view of Takekuma, Kimura, Slocum and Cakmakci. Claims 12 and 16 were rejected as obvious in view of Takekuma, Kimura, and Slocum; while claims 13-15 and 17 were rejected as obvious in view of Takekuma, Kimura and Lei et al. For the reasons set forth in detail below, it is respectfully submitted that this application is now in condition for allowance.

Initially, Applicants appreciate the Examiner's comments regarding interpretation under 35 USC §112. However, Applicants respectfully disagree, because for certain features the Examiner has added functional requirements that are not set forth in the claims. Under 35 USC §112, the corresponding structure of the specification is that which is necessary to perform the claimed function, and additional functions which are not recited should not be added to the claims. With respect to the various transfer means, the Office Action adds functions that were not specified in the claims. Although the claims would read on the devices that would perform such functions, the claims are not limited to devices that would require those functions. For example, with reference to the first transfer means, the Office Action adds the requirement that the transfer means must move along x, y, z and rotational directions. However, this function is not specified in the claims. Further by way of example, with respect to the second transfer means, although a disclosed embodiment includes a

transfer device having two arms, the inclusion of two arms is not necessary to perform the claimed function. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully differ with regard to the interpretation of the Office Action to the extent the Office Action identifies structure not necessary to perform the claimed function and to the extent the Office Action adds functions that are not set forth in the claims. Included in the newly submitted claims is new independent claim 20, which does not include means-plus-function language.

Applicants also appreciate the comments regarding claim 17, and the dependency of claim 17 has been modified.

Turning to the rejections based on the prior art, in accordance with the present invention, Applicants have recognized an advantageous arrangement which allows for elasticity of the demand of the processing apparatus, so that the apparatus can be utilized in high throughput demand situations and also in relatively lower throughput demand situations. Moreover, in the relatively lower throughput demand situations the user need not be burdened with the costs associated with a high throughput demand situation. Further, Applicants provide a novel and non-obvious arrangement for achieving the foregoing, which arrangement is not disclosed or suggested by the cited references.

In accordance with the present invention, a transfer block is provided in order to transfer substrates from a carrier block to one or more process blocks that are provided along a transfer path of the transfer block. Further, the one or more process blocks are freely attachable/detachable with respect to the transfer block, and one or more utilities units or utilities connection sites are provided so that utilities are supplied to the process blocks by way of the transfer block. Further, within each process block an additional transfer means or transfer apparatus is provided to transfer substrates within the process block.

It is respectfully submitted that the cited references fail to disclose or render obvious the combined features of the present claims.

The Office Action primarily relies upon Takekuma. However, Takekuma fails to disclose or render obvious the provision of a transfer block which is utilized as a location to which plural process blocks can be freely attached/detached, nor does Takekuma teach the provision of a transfer block as a location to which process blocks can be connected for the supply of the utilities to the process blocks by way of the transfer block.

The Office Action points to Kimura as disclosing a modular processing apparatus with process blocks G1, G2 that are described in the Office Action as modular. However, the present claims do not recite the mere concept of modularity, and the present claims recite numerous features that are not disclosed or rendered obvious by the cited references. In particular, Kimura and the remaining references fail to disclose or suggest the provision of one or more process blocks, in which each of the process blocks includes plural processing units, with the process blocks being freely attachable/detachable to the transfer block as set forth in the present claims. The cited references also fail to disclose or suggest providing a transfer block having sites to which one or more process blocks can be freely attachable/detachable. Moreover, the cited references also fail to disclose or suggest providing utilities units or utilities connection sites between a transfer block and one or more process blocks (each process block including plural processing units) in which utilities are supplied to the process blocks by way of connection sites provided on the transfer block. Further, the present invention does not relate merely to separation of equipment for maintenance. Instead, Applicants have recognized a novel and non-obvious arrangement which can accommodate a wide range of throughput demands, and moreover, for user's having relatively lower throughput demands, they need not be burdened by the same expense

as a user that might have higher throughput demands. Further, the arrangement of the present invention allows for reliable modification, so that if users throughput demands change, additional process units can be added to the previously existing or previously used structure.

The remaining references do not overcome the deficiencies to Takekuma and Kimura. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that the cited references fail to disclose or render obvious the combined features of the present independent claims. Accordingly, it is submitted that each of the present independent claims, 1, 4 and 20, is now in condition for allowance. The dependent claims are allowable for at least the same reasons. Moreover, it is submitted that the present dependent claims recite numerous additional features which are not suggested by the cited references, particularly in combination with the features of the present independent claims.

A Notice of Allowance for claims 1-7, 9-12 and 14-23 is earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner deem that any further action is necessary to place this application in even better form for allowance, he is encouraged to contact Applicants' undersigned representative at the below listed telephone number.

Respectfully submitted,

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